

**AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS**

The listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application.

**Listing of Claims:**

1. (Original) A method of reducing microbial levels on the carcass of an animal during the slaughtering process, the method comprising: stunning the animal; and applying a first antimicrobial agent to at least a portion of the hide of the animal, subsequent to stunning and prior to removal of the hide.
2. (Original) The method of claim 1 further comprising, after the applying step, drying the hide, such that moisture is substantially removed from the surface of the hide
3. (Original) The method of claim 2 further comprising, after the stunning step, exsanguinating the animal to cause clinical death.
4. (Original) The method of claim 2 further comprising applying a second antimicrobial agents to the animal hide.
5. (Original) The method of claim 2 further comprising rinsing the animal hide.
6. (Original) The method of claim 5 further comprising applying a third antimicrobial agent after removing moisture from the animal hide, wherein the third antimicrobial agent is applied only to a hide incision pattern.
7. (Original) The method of claim 2 further comprising applying an additional amount of the first antimicrobial agent after removing the animal hide from a carcass, wherein the addition antimicrobial agent is applied only to incisions in the carcass along the hide pattern.

8. (Original) The method of claim 2 further comprising further applying a second antimicrobial agent after removing the animal hide from a carcass, wherein the second antimicrobial agent is applied only to incisions in the carcass along the hide pattern.
9. (Original) The method of claim 2 further comprising removing the hide from the animal and placing the hide in a transport flume.
10. (Original) The method of claim 9 further comprising collecting a waste liquid of the first antimicrobial agent and adding the waste portion to the transport flume.
11. (Original) The method of claim 2 wherein the first antimicrobial agent is about four percent sodium hydroxide by volume in water
12. (Original) The method of claim 11 wherein the antimicrobial agent is applied to the hide by spraying at a pressure of about 900 psi.
13. (Original) The method of claim 2 wherein the first antimicrobial agent includes a surfactant.
14. (Original) The method of claim 2 wherein the first antimicrobial agent includes a loosening agent.
15. (Original) The method of claim 2 wherein the first antimicrobial agent includes an additive chosen from the group consisting of: bases, acids, esters, oxidizers, enzymes, and treated water.
16. (Original) The method of claim 2 wherein the first antimicrobial agent includes an additive chosen from the group consisting of: sodium hydroxide, chlorine, trisodium phosphate, sodium metasilicate, phosphoric acid, fatty acid monoesters, organic acids, and hydrogen peroxide.
17. (Original) The method of claim 2 wherein the first antimicrobial agent includes fatty acid monoesters.

18. (Original) The method of claim 2 wherein the antimicrobial agent is selected from the group consisting of: sodium hydroxide, chlorofoam, Scalite SR, and trisodium phosphate.
19. (Original) The method of claim 2 wherein the spraying the animal hide is performed at a spray pressure of about 900 psi.
20. (Original) A method of reducing microbial levels on an animal prior to removal of an animal hide, the method comprising: stunning the animal; providing an antimicrobial agent, subsequent to stunning and prior to removal of the hide; and washing the animal hide with the antimicrobial agent, wherein the washing is performed at a pressure of between about 50 psi and about 2000 psi.
21. (Original) The method of claim 20 wherein the antimicrobial agent is water.
22. (Original) The method of claim 20 wherein the antimicrobial agent includes fatty acid monoesters.
23. (Original) The method of claim 20 wherein the antimicrobial agent includes sodium hydroxide.
24. (Original) The method of claim 20 wherein the antimicrobial agent is selected from the group consisting of: sodium hydroxide, chlorofoam, Scalite SR, and trisodium phosphate.
25. (Original) The method of claim 20 wherein the antimicrobial agent includes an additive chosen from the group consisting of: chlorine, trisodium phosphate, sodium metasilicate, phosphoric acid, fatty acid monoesters, organic acids, and hydrogen peroxide.
26. (Original) The method of claim 20 further comprising drying the animal hide.
27. (Original) A method of reducing microbial levels comprising: spraying an animal hide with a first antimicrobial agent; rinsing the animal hide with a rinse fluid; drying the animal hide;

removing the animal hide from a carcass of the animal, after the drying step; and placing the animal hide in a transport flume having a solution including an antimicrobial agent.

28. (Original) The method of claim 27 wherein the solution is a waste solution from antimicrobial treatment of the animal hide.

29. (Original) The method of claim 28 wherein the waste solution includes residual antimicrobial agent from spraying the animal hide.

30. (Original) The method of claim 27 wherein the first antimicrobial agent includes water.

31. (Original) The method of claim 27 wherein the rinse fluid includes water.

32. (Original) The method of claim 27 wherein the first antimicrobial agent is selected from the group consisting of: sodium hydroxide, chlorofoam, Scalite SR, and trisodium phosphate.

33-44. (Canceled)

45. (Original) A method of reducing microbial levels on a hide of an animal during the slaughtering process, the method comprising:

stunning the animal;

exsanguinating the animal; and

subsequently applying a first antimicrobial agent and a second antimicrobial agent to at least a portion of the hide prior to removal of the hide.

46. (Original) The method of claim 45 further comprising, after the applying step, drying the hide to remove moisture from the surface of the hide.

47. (Original) The method of claim 45 wherein the applying step comprises applying the first antimicrobial agent and subsequently applying the second antimicrobial agent.

48. (Original) The method of claim 47 wherein the first antimicrobial agent comprises water and at least one additional antimicrobial agent and the second antimicrobial agent comprises water.

49. (Original) The method of claim 45 wherein the first antimicrobial agent and the second antimicrobial agent are combined prior to application onto the hide.

50. (Original) The method of claim 49 wherein the first antimicrobial agent comprises water and the second antimicrobial agent comprises an additional antimicrobial agent.

51. (Original) The method of claim 50 comprising about 0.1 to about 5.0 percent by volume of the additional antimicrobial agent.

52. (Original) The method of claim 50 wherein the first and second antimicrobial agents comprise a mixture of a basic material and water.

53. (Original) The method of claim 50 wherein the first and second antimicrobial agents comprise a mixture of sodium hydroxide and water.

54. (Original) The method of claim 45 wherein the applying step comprises washing the hide with the first antimicrobial agent and rinsing the hide with the second antimicrobial agent.

55. (Original) The method of claim 45 further comprising applying at least a third antimicrobial agent to the hide.

56. (Original) The method of claim 45 wherein the first or second antimicrobial agent includes a base, acid, ester, oxidizer, enzyme, or treated water.

57. (Original) A method of reducing microbial levels on a hide of an animal during the slaughtering process, the method comprising:

stunning the animal; and

applying a solution to at least a portion of the hide prior to removal of the hide, the solution comprising between about 0.1 to about 5.0 percent by volume of an antimicrobial agent.

58-62. (Canceled)

63. (Original) A method of reducing microbial levels on the carcass of an animal during the slaughtering process, the method comprising:

stunning the animal; and

applying a first antimicrobial agent to at least a portion of the hide of the stunned animal, prior to removal of the hide, wherein the first antimicrobial agent is applied to the hide by spraying at a pressure of between about 50 and about 2000 psi.